The Languages of Security

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A key task for this report is to assist in the understanding of the question of perceptions in the process of the formation of security policy - against a background of potentially limiting cross-cultural incomprehension. In a lament on his own experience in Australia's military intelligence bureaucracy Paul Dibb gave a particular cast to this problem: how is it possible to get intelligence officers to depict accurately the political decision-making process in the countries they are attempting to understand? The end result of policy decisions and debates is usually more or less visible: what is often much less obvious are the processes, institutional and otherwise, by which the decisions are arrived at, the terms in which the issues are presented by relevant actors, and most importantly, the cognitive frameworks within which arguments are mounted and interests pursued. Of course, there are eternal problems about the collection of information, access, and so forth. But Dibb was raising a singular difficulty is in this last problem, as it applies to both the collection of information and its analysis: comprehending - or even registering - from a distance the cognitive structures that inform security policy debate - learning to read the languages of security policy. In another context, a senior Indonesian minister suggested that in 1986 political elites in Australia and Indonesia so misunderstood each other that the two countries almost found themselves "coming to blows". Both these examples suggest, though they by no means prove, that there are potential problems rooted in sometimes mutually incomprehensible outlooks.

"Languages" - in the broadest sense of the term - embody and allow the expression of particular ways of understanding the world, or portions of it that are deemed relevant to the matter at hand. The selection of one language often carries with it a cognitive (and often affectual) structure and set of assumptions about social reality quite different from another language - and on occasion, in an exclusive fashion, or so it is argued. For example, the language of western strategic analysis of threats and force structures finds it very difficult to translate the logic of, say traditional Javanese statecraft and military analysis. And yet, in Indonesia, it is nothing at all out of the ordinary to find Javanese military officers who use both languages to discuss and conceptualize the same military and political problems, albeit possibly at different times and to different audiences.

1. Varieties of languages

The first task, then, is to sketch the range of languages employed to discuss security questions. We should then review the question of whether or not these languages are in any sense exclusive of each other, or whether their employment leads to divergent results in relevant policy processes. Whatever the answer to that question may be, we should also raise questions about the authenticity with which claims of culturally-determined difference or incomprehension are made.

If an analyst is to reconstruct accurately the process of security decision-making, then they must be sure that at the very least they are capable of understanding the languages employed and the messages conveyed by that fact alone, let alone the particular content of statements.

(a) "Strategic studies USA"

Undoubtedly, the single most widespread and significant language of security derives from the tradition of strategic thought expounded for the better part of a century in Western European and North American military schools and their academic opposite numbers. Very often conducted in English or in almost direct translation from English, strategic studies provides the language utilized in virtually all international discussions of military and political security problems amongst state elites and their academic associates.

The uniformity of this language across national linguistic, cultural and political boundaries is a perfect example of the more general structural isomorphism characteristic of the global state system derived from modern Europe via colonialism and a world market, but more particularly of the highly systemic character of contemporary patterns of militarization. In the case of the language of strategic studies (or "national security studies"), consciously constructed networks of state elite education and training have been particularly important: through universities, military academies, strategic studies centres, and their associated publications.

Its practitioners claim that this language and its concepts are universal because they reflect the objective realities of war and geo-politics in a world long since adjusted to continuing high levels of militarization. Leaving aside for one moment the truth of this claim, it is important to remember that the language of strategic studies in, say, the publications of RIPA, ISIS or SDSC, or in Asian Defence Journal or Teknologi, Strategi, Militer is effectively the same, whether in English, Malay, Indonesian or Japanese.

 It is also significant that the language of the apparently oppositional stream of institutional peace research is in many respects identical to the language of strategic studies, with the more or less obvious differences of matters of political inflection, the relative emphasis on particular parts of the explanatory set, and occasionally wider references to matters of economic development, social justice, and gender relations. By and large however, its terms and the institutional means of its propagation throughout the region would be entirely recognizable to practitioners of strategic studies.

It must be said that discussion of security questions in Australia, a country as Hugh Collins has put it, so long habituated to imperialism, is virtually univocal: the language of strategic studies and its slight variants is the language of the state and all but a small though significant group seeking to broaden the terms of security discourse. Leaving aside questions of adequacy and effectiveness for the present, for the analyst seeking to look beyond this univocal strategic culture, a sensitivity to other security languages is essential - particularly because that same language of strategic studies is so widely employed by state elites throughout the region in international discussion.

(b) "Comprehensive security"
The term "comprehensive security" is now widely recognised in English following translations of its use in Japanese government discussions from the early 1980s. In that particular context, it referred to a conception of Japanese security requirements beyond the simply political and military, emphasizing the salience of such questions of reliability of resource supplies (especially energy), the world trading order, and so forth. While the term may have been relatively new in English, the concept was not - or should not have been - with an awareness of mercantilist state projects from nineteenth century Prussia to contemporary Korea. In fact, because of the dominance of security discussions by strategic studies, and the institutional separation of matters of security and economics in the liberal economic tradition, this alternative language of security has been surprisingly difficult to hear - as the United States is now discovering to its cost in matters economic.

Yet it is also important to understand that just as the Japanese language of comprehensive security was not invented by the Ohira study group in 1979-1980, nor is it the only example in the region. South Korea, with a mercantilist-militarist state intellectual tradition very strongly influenced by almost half a century of Japanese colonial occupation, is the most obvious example. In the history of the KCIA, for example (since 1980 the ANSP), there has long been a concern about the interconnections between "security policy" and "economic policy and practice" - as there was in the mind of its Japanese-trained founder, General Park Chung-hee. In many respects, the subsequent powerful influence of the US alliance (not least in matters of language) may muffle the sound, probably overwhelmingly in the vernacular, of another language all together.

In a rather different sense, Indonesian military doctrine also speaks in a language of comprehensive security - though throughout most of its history, in a thoroughly inward-looking manner compared to the external orientation of Japan. From the name of the relevant department ("Defence and Security"), to the stated security objectives of that department ("ketahanan nasional" - commonly translated as national resilience), through to the structure and operational procedures of the armed forces into areas of direct domestic social control including territorial operations, social and political operations, and the activities of army officers in non- military roles under the doctrine of the military's "dual- function" in society. In part the legacy of ABRI's origins in the revolutionary struggle by nationalist guerilla forces, and in part reflecting deficiencies in legitimacy and a resulting need for coercive surveillance and control of the population, the language of comprehensive security here does reflect deeply felt preoccupations of the state.

(c) "Green Peace"

A further variant on the language of comprehensive security comes from beyond the state, though it is penetrating the language of strategic studies, especially through the question of global warming and global food security. For want of a better summary term, this language can be called "Green Peace" (as distinguished from one of the prominent speakers of the language, Greenpeace the organisation). Like Strategic Studies USA, Green Peace is also a transnational language with universalist claims. For the present purposes, it is important to observe not only the aversion to the state-centred character of strategic studies and other state-centred conceptions of comprehensive security, but also its almost natural tendency to seek an alternative conception of comprehensive global security as an antidote to the fragmentation of comprehension imposed by the western analytical tradition. This may well be its most immediately important contribution, especially given the institutional rigidities surrounding the separation of security policy and economic policy. (There are echoes of certain non-Western cultural traditions here, however tendentious they may be: for example, those who would make a religion of Gaia.) Of course, Green Peace, as the language of a transnationalised social movement which acts as bearer of this cognitive structure, has a far greater political significance which is not the issue here. However, the fact that the language of Green Peace is dissonant to the ears of those accustomed to speaking the language of strategic studies is a guide to the importance of listening more carefully for its presence and influence.

Arguably the language of the most significant non-state transnational social movement other than Islam and feminism, Green Peace is, when viewed globally, a significant and potent language of security, albeit one which is often inimical to and de-centred from mainstream strategic studies notions of national security.

(d) Non-western languages of security

The most difficult problem is the undoubted existence of languages in which security is discussed which embody and allow the expression of views of politics, the state and the relation of sovereign and people quite distinct from any of the essentially western traditions we have discussed already. If claims that Australians are constitutionally incapable of understanding the ways of politics in Indonesia or the processes of Japanese conflict resolution are to be taken seriously, then it is here that we must look.

On occasion, the suggestion is made that such world views can be grasped by focussing on elements of foreign language. For example, the Meiji state's slogan of "fukoku kyohei" - "a rich country and a strong army" is often quoted to explain Japan's security policies at different times since the 1860s. Yet in itself the slogan tells us virtually nothing. Indeed it could equally be taken as the objective of this country's National Party and its predecessors. What mattered in fact was the particular way in which the connection between the state and economic activity was consistently understood in the past century in Japan in order to achieve the quite widely accepted goals of prosperity and strength.

It is of course important to understand the general culture and history of the country under study. Had a US intelligence officer overheard Prime Minister Tojo in November 1941 replying to a sceptic about the wisdom of the proposed Pearl Harbour attack, "Sometimes one must leap from the platform of Kiyomizu temple", then indeed some sense of weakness and risk of the Japanese position would have been understood - provided the allusion to the chasm over which the temple is built was known.

But this really is not the problem. The salient example is also potentially the most powerful and important for Australia: the language and cognitive structure of Javanese statecraft. For many thousands of Javanese military officers, and rather more importantly, for the President of Indonesia himself, the fact of speaking Javanese as a first language at the very least brings awareness of a living tradition of political thought reaching back in continuous state usage well beyond the Christian era.

[Insert sketch of (a) Javanese conceptions of statecraft and (b) Javanese conceptions of military science (from Peter Britton).]

For Indonesia more broadly, a comparable set of comments could be made concerning the salience of the language of Islam in a country increasingly conscious of being the world's most populous Islamic country. (And this is something that westerners, especially it seems Australians, find singularly difficult to accept without almost entirely ignorant and prejudged responses.)

There should be no doubt whatsoever that for the present President of Indonesia and many amongst the political and military elites of Indonesia - and perhaps more significantly, the great mass of people in the heartlands of Central and East Java upon whose thinking questions of legitimacy in Indonesia finally turn - these are completely normal languages of politics - foreign as much as domestic. The question of primacy and efficacy will be addressed below, but it is extremely important not to lose sight of these considerations when trying to reconstruct processes of decision-making involving such people.

(e) Symbolic languages of security

2. Questions of efficacy, salience and priority.

The serious question in all of this is the question of mutual misperception because of incomprehension. If the decision of a foreign country to take some position or action in a security field are always explained internationally by its leaders to their counterparts in other countries in the more or less common elite language of strategic studies, is there anything more that needs to be understood? In more brutal terms, so what that foreigners may at times think in ways we find difficult to comprehend, so long as there is a translation process into the common (and, it is meant) proper language of strategic studies?

The answer to this question is equivocal. Quite simply we do not know, though it is possible to unpick the problem in ways that might help in the future.

There is nothing surprising in finding people thinking within more than one cognitive framework, or with apparently radically incompatible outlooks and languages, though never without strain and attendant compensatory or protective forms of social organization. Christians have been required to do so - and for some with great difficulty and pain - ever since Christ commended them to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's,...". Anthropological and psychological studies of bureaucracies of nuclear war planners have demonstrated, entirely as one would expect, structural organizational arrangements to facilitate the processes of psychic numbing and denial (Lifton) that enables people to separate the "normal" world of everyday life from the "normal" activity of planning for mass killing in war.

Moreover, it is clear that, for example, in the case of a Javanese president of Indonesia, different languages are employed when addressing different audiences. In general, the language of strategic studies in Bahasa Indonesia is less important in communicating with the bulk of the population of Indonesia than allusions, verbal or otherwise, to the widely shared and deeply resonant understandings of politics and history derived from the putatively mythical world portrayed in the wayang.

However, while such a leader would in the main speak in the language of strategic studies (mutatis mutandis) when addressing an international conference or meeting with diplomats, it is by no means the case that such speech should be assumed to be univocal. Indeed, it is much more likely that for those that have ears to hear and eyes to see there are other layers of meaning. It may be revealed in an historical allusion, or an allusion to a wayang story, or in the timing of an action in relation to the Javanese calendar. Possibly such languages are only intended for domestic observers of such interactions, but probably not. Without a doubt, there is an important loss in failing to hear such messages, because not only is the information lost, but by being revealed to be deaf to such messages in itself is taken to reveal a lack of worth, intelligence, or indeed, civilization. In general we would not wish such judgments to be made, in addition to needing every scrap of information we can obtain about significant security decisions in the closed political circles of most countries in East and Southeast Asia.

Yet, there still remains the hard question: can it be shown that the existence of distinct and divergent languages of security in this sense alters the assessment of security matters that would ordinarily be made in the language of strategic studies. That policy positions may be rooted in cultural concerns or a sense of cultural threat is undoubtedly true, but it not the issue here.

It is extremely hard to show that in areas where a state is deeply implicated in the global military system decisions have been made for reasons which are not comprehensible through the language of strategic analysis - assuming it is competently done. The purchase of arms, the deployment of troops, the design of force-structures, the decision to go to war in post-colonial Asia do not seem to require another layer of explanation to be comprehensible. That is in part what is meant by the claim that the global military structure has a systemic character, a socio-technical system originating from western technologically-focussed culture employing a quite specific though now widely shared concept of rationality.

That said, however, it is important to make immediately three qualifications. The first is to reiterate the point that cultural matters are deeply significant to the security policy of any nation, and particularly visible in some cases. We have already spoken of threats. Another example: the ethnic make- up of the armed forces of Malaysia and Fiji, to take just to examples, reflect what Cynthia Enloe has called ethnic security maps held by the state. Such examples can easily be multiplied. The point to make is that there is nothing particularly difficult about the process of perception or the languages of explanation in these cases.

The second qualification is to recall that just because a particular security action or policy has been explained by the government in terms common to other governments - or can be understood by observers in those terms even in the face of silence - does not at all mean that the actual process of decision followed such course in such a language. Indeed, everything that is known about the process of decision-making in general suggests that it would be absurd to expect it to be so.

And the third qualification is to guard against the assumption that the future will necessarily be like the past. While it is extremely difficult to do otherwise, if the case of Indonesia is considered, it is perfectly possible that both the language of Javanese statecraft and the language of Islam will swell in significance, though for quite different reasons (domestic and foreign), even while the internationalist languages of strategic studies and its economic equivalent appear to hold sway, and may well in fact to do so.

3. Questions of authenticity: "cultural difference" as screen

All cultures are fields of conflict: there is no one uncontested entity to be named as "Indonesian culture", still less the "Asian Way" or the "Pacific Way". The former is in fact a complex and many-layered, imbricated creature in a continual and long-term process of change and contestation. The latter, however, are much more conscious short-term and recent constructions by state elites that neither correspond to the lived experience of the people to whom they allegedly apply, nor survive serious scrutiny of their alleged components.

No cultures are "natural": all are blends of unconscious and conscious construction over a longer or shorter time. However the process of state formation in some parts of East and Southeast Asia has relied a great deal on high level of quite conscious ideological construction by the state, and active institutional promotion of such ideologies. In the case of the communist states of Asia this is perfectly obvious. Yet it is equally true of two states with which Australia has major and not untroubled relations, namely Japan and Indonesia.

The "invention of tradition" in Eric Hobsbawm's phrase has been an central activity of various parts of the Japanese state since the earliest days of the Meiji state. Two such areas relevant to Japan's international affairs are the longstanding Ministry of Education censorship and direction of school textbooks and the elaboration of ideologies of food security. A more complex, but ultimately equally important area is what one writer as called the "myth of Japanese uniqueness" (*nihonjinron* - the theory of Japaneseness) - the intellectualised conservative nationalism that pervades an astonishing amount of Japanese intellectual life.

In the case of Indonesia, where, as we have seen, there is an extremely significant set of deeply-held worldviews of great salience to questions of security policy (in the case of Javanese culture and Islam). But there is also a very large state effort at generating, elaborating and disseminating the state ideology of Panca Sila - the Five Principles. For the present purposes, the content of Panca Sila ideology is irrelevant: it is simply enough to note both the state's demand of the primacy of its own ideology over all others, including Islam with its insistence that all other cultural activity be subordinated to it, and the fact that this ideology is quite visibly a constructed one.

This situation brings us back to questions of authenticity. All of the languages of which we have spoken have their own norms for testing coherence and truth content: there can be no simple assumption of superiority or automatic truth. Yet equally, it is clear that claims of "cultural differences" may be used in bad faith, when in fact there is no actual misperception, simply disagreement which is quite comprehensible.   Given the very real actual differences in both culture and policy that do obtain in the region, this is an extremely serious matter. As a settler country in which multi- culturalism is more than a facade but less than a secure reality, Australians will for a long time be in the position of needing to listen carefully for the suppression of alternate voices that comes so easily in a

basically univocal culture. And yet, it is a culture in which cultural contestation is conducted vigorously and openly. The accusation of ethnocentrism at any given time may be true or false, but there should be a sufficiently robust cultural sensitivity (if that is not an oxymoron) to be able to discern the moment when the claim of cultural insensitivity is simply a matter of using culture as a screen for policy. The insensitivities of Australian tourists in Bali do not in themselves mean that Indonesian government claims to be unable to understand how the Australian press operates so as to allow criticism of Indonesia should be greeted with anything else but the polite smiles of scepticism.